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Contact(s): Maureen Sullivan, WSDOT, (206) 464-1216
Marianne Bichsel, City of Seattle, (206) 684-8878

Nisqually Anniversary Highlights Viaduct's Significance, Vulnerability

Seattle – On the eve of the second anniversary of the Nisqually earthquake, business and government leaders celebrated progress in securing funding for the Alaskan Way Viaduct and seawall replacement project and urged the State Legislature to close the gap.

Today, the Puget Sound Regional Council of Governments approved \$1.2 million for the viaduct. Coupled with \$2 million recently secured by Sen. Patty Murray and \$5 million committed by the City of Seattle, significant funding is in place to continue environmental review. To do that job, select the best design and get the green light for construction, the project needs at least \$15 million, which WSDOT and the City are seeking from the Legislature.

PSRC recognized that State Route 99 is a corridor that is vital to the region's economy. "Let's not forget the lessons of the Nisqually Earthquake," said Mayor Greg Nickels, a PSRC member. "Mother Nature gave us a message that the crumbling Viaduct is seismically weak and must be replaced. The Legislature must move before the Viaduct moves again."

Officials said the viaduct -- State Route 99 -- poses a continuing threat to the region's economy and public safety, a point made clear when the 2001 earthquake forced a temporary closure of the structure. Subsequent testing revealed serious weaknesses with the Viaduct and the adjoining Alaskan Way Seawall.

"Without additional state support, this project will shut down by the end of this year," said Washington State Transportation Commission Chair Aubrey Davis. "In safety and economic terms, the region and state cannot afford to let this happen."

"Among other regional priorities, we depend on the viaduct for its economic health and basic public safety," said Richard McIver, Seattle City Councilman and PSRC President.

Businesses also urged action. Looking back on the earthquake's impact on viaduct traffic, the freight industry fears what may happen if construction of a replacement is delayed.

"Nisqually made everyone aware of the Alaskan Way Viaduct's statewide significance. Hundreds of trucks experienced major delays when the viaduct was closed in the days after the quake," said Ed Vander Pol, President of the Washington Trucking Association. "If this project doesn't continue to progress, I fear the impact a long-term closure would have on our industry."

For more information, visit the project website at: www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/viaduct.